

# The News Journal

## Survive the Bite of Your Electric Bill

How to save money: Put a stop to those little wasteful habits

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Shaving a few dollars off your heating and cooling bills isn't as hard as many people think, and it can be done without spending thousands of dollars for a new air conditioning system or vinyl windows.

Experts say the most effective ways to save are also the cheapest: adjusting the thermostat, weatherstripping doors and windows and being cranky with the kids about turning off the lights.

"The basic things are very dramatic," said Matt Urban of the Delaware Chapter of the Sierra Club, an environmental group that has advocated expanded conservation and new, clean sources of power, such as solar panels.

Most Delaware residents are likely to see power bills go up 59 percent May 1 when price caps end for the state's dominant electric company, Delmarva Power.

The company has said the increase is necessary because the cost for wholesale power has risen dramatically since 1999. That's when price caps were adopted as part of a state law that removed regulations on the price of electricity.

The people hit hardest by such increases often are the poor and middle class, who may not be able to spend hundreds of dollars to replace inefficient refrigerators or add new layers of insulation.

For them, the best way to lower their bills is to start paying attention to the little things that waste heat in the winter and air conditioning in the summer, said Urban.

"Being mindful of what your doing can make a big difference," he said. The Delaware chapter of the Sierra Club launched a conservation campaign last year aimed at teaching people how to cut 25 percent from their bills.

Rita Gordon, of Glenn Mills, Pa., said her heating bill was \$450 for December, which was double what her family paid the year before. Gordon lives in a four bedroom house

with central air conditioning and good insulation, so there are few physical improvements she can make to improve efficiency. Instead, the family has changed habits.

"My husband has taken it upon himself to never let the thermostat go up," Gordon said.  
"No one in the house walks around barefoot any more."

Don Roberts of Bear has a typical electricity bill in the summer of about \$350 a month, mainly because of the central air conditioning system. Because of the coming increase in Delmarva's power rates, Roberts said his family may have to adjust to a slightly warmer house this summer.

"I'm not looking forward to it," Roberts said.

The family probably will wind up spending more time in their finished basement, where it is cooler, or outside by the pool. But he also will get his teenage son to pay more attention to the light switches and the computer, which is usually left running.

"My son is famous for leaving everything on," he said.

When the big bills do hit, they can be tough to pay, said Annett Long, of Wilmington.

"I usually use my tax return to catch up on my heating bill every year," Long said. In the past she used to leave the heat running when she went to work because she didn't like to come home and wait for an hour for the house to warm up. That changed this winter.

"When I leave, I turn it down," Long said.

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